

USAR_J-07_Maeda

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My name is Takeshi Maeda. I was born on March 31, 1921. I'll be 88 years old this year.

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I joined the Navy on October 1, 1938.

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After I graduated from middle school, I was thinking about going to Waseda University. I wanted to be an architect in the future, so I was thinking about going to a professional school or a university where I could learn architecture. But at the same time when I graduated from middle school, my father died. I had two older brothers who joined the army and fought in China. So I had to take care of my mother, and I gave up going to a university. Right before I graduated from school, a naval officer visited our school to make a speech. The Navy had started Yoka-ren, a flight training curriculum, in 1931. Then, the Navy had visited elementary schools to recruit many young pilots to the flight training. However, those trainees were not as smart as the ones who graduated from middle school. Then, the Navy started recruiting middle-school graduates to the flight training, and visited many middle schools. I happened to hear about it, and I persuaded my mother and took a test. I passed it and I joined the Yokosuka flight corps of the Navy. That was the beginning.

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It was before the war started...

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According to this, it was on October 1, 1938. I passed a test and joined the Yokosuka flight corps of the Navy. At the attack on Pearl Harbor, I was ordered to transfer to the carrier Kaga, and went there on September 18, 1941. We were trained to drop torpedoes at 10 meters above the surface of the water. We used buoys floated near Sakurajima as targets, and we dropped torpedoes towards them. We repeated this training many times. It was September 1941.

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All pilots of the carrier Kaga transferred to the base in Kagoshima. We took a train to get there. Instead of getting on board the carrier, we took a train. When the carrier stayed at its port in Japan, the pilots didn't do any training on the ship. All pilots gathered at land base and we had trainings there. But, I think that there must have been some agreements, because at regular intervals, Kaga came all the way to

Kagoshima. When the carrier was in Kagoshima, we were trained to do "touch and go" at night. If we didn't practice that, we would lose our instinct, and we would fail. We, pilots, never stayed at the carrier. We always stayed at a land base, and we transferred to the carrier when we left for an attack. While the carrier stayed at a port in Japan, we didn't have anything special to do. So we were trained at the airport near the water, in Kinko Bay, Kagoshima.

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It was hard to keep flying at 10 meters above the surface of the water, because the plane got wet with the spray. We couldn't fly lower than 10 meters. We had to keep the plane 10 meters above the water. The altimeter didn't work when you flew lower than 10 meters. It was difficult to fly at just 10 meters without experiences. We did the training every day. I was wondering why we need this training, but I had no idea that we would fight against the U.S. I thought we would go to Singapore or Hong Kong. At that time, I had no idea that we would start a war against the U.S.

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When we arrived at Kagoshima, they started the trainings. I was the last who joined them. So Yoshino-san had already started the training. I think they had started five months before we got there. Though you didn't ask me about this, as I mentioned earlier, when the carrier was at anchor, we didn't have anything special to do. We didn't need to stay on the ship. Kaga enter Sasebo, because it was its home port. Before it entered Sasebo, we, pilots, took off the carrier, and landed on our land base. Our base was located in front of Kagoshima Bay. It was a small base with only one runway, and it could escape notice. We could see Sakurajima from there. It used to be a race track. They converted it into a base for our training. I went there in July, and left for Hitokappu Bay of Etorofu Island. When we left for Hitokappu Bay of Etorofu Island, there was no announcement yet that we would fight against the U.S. After we arrived at Hitokappu Bay, all aviators from six carriers were gathered at Akagi on November 24, and Commander Genda told us that we would go to war against the U.S.

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First of all, Pearl Harbor is very shallow and it is 25 meters deep at most, 20 meters deep at least. At that time, our torpedoes needed to go to 50 meters under the water, and then it went up back near the surface, and hit the target. As I told you before, if we didn't drop a torpedo at just 10 meters, it didn't run well. Besides, when we dropped it, it tended to turn around. It usually went back on the level right before it reached the target. However, there were only 750 meters between Ford Island, where the ships stayed, and the east

coast of Pearl Harbor. We flew at low altitude between those two points, and we couldn't approach too close nor too far. So we needed certain skills. Akagi and Kaga had 12 planes each, and Soryu and Hiryu had 8 planes each. In total 40 planes. Only 40 airplanes were chosen among other airplanes to attack on Pearl Harbor, flying at low altitude. At the same time, there was another reason why only 40 planes were chosen. Our target was the battleship West Virginia. After we dropped a torpedo at the shallow water, it didn't stop turning around, though it was supposed to run straight towards its target. So to fix this problem, we needed to reproduce torpedoes, and after all, we did only 40. Akagi had the best pilots among other carriers, and Akagi and Kaga got 12 torpedoes each, and Soryu and Hiryu eight each. And, pilots from Shokaku and Zuikaku weren't trained to launch torpedoes at low altitude. To prepare for a war against the U.S, Shokaku and Zuikaku were manufactured quick, and they were done right before the outbreak of war. Thus, pilots were not ready for launch of a torpedo at low altitude. Though we had six carriers, Shokaku and Zuikaku didn't have torpedo bombers. Only Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, and Hiryu did. It was a very hard duty, and it required us to get skilled well. Even now we are praised by how good we were.

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There was a air base in Tomitaka, Miyazaki Prefecture. The torpedo bombers of Kaga moved from Kagoshima to Tomitaka Air Base in Miyazaki. So I went to Tomitaka with everybody. At midnight when a ship loaded with 12 or 14 torpedoes entered Tomitaka from Sasebo, we loaded them onto Kaga. In the next early morning, we left the port, and we sailed out off Shikoku. Watching Shikoku Island on the left hand, we had an announcement by Captain Okada, and all aviators were gathered at the flight deck. All of us wondered what was going on. Captain Okada told us, "Though I can't tell everything yet, there is a possibility that all of you may not return home. Even our carrier may not return the port in Japan. That is Shikoku. You may not see it again. We should say farewell to Japan now." That was his speech. I felt we finally would go to war, though I didn't know who yet. Considering the direction, I though we would head towards the middle of the Pacific Ocean. That night, I went to a hangar to check a compass on a plane in order to know where we would head. I found out that we sailed out off Hachijojima Island. Before that, I had thought our target would have been Hong Kong or Singapore. But now I thought our target would be the U.S. or the U.S.S., because we headed towards the north of the U.S. If so, there was only one American base in the Kamchatka Peninsula. I could tell that from the compass.

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We left Tomitaka around the mid-November. Though I didn't tell you this, we were given two days of leave, and our chief encouraged us to go back home for two days. We usually got vacations only on New Year's Day or during summer. Since we didn't have any vacation for a while, I felt that something significant would happen. I was from Fukui Prefecture, and the two days were not long enough to go back home. One of my classmates on Kaga, who was from Ooita Prefecture, invited me to his home, and I went with him and stayed there for two days. Then, I came back to Tomitaka. As you said, we were told to bring summer clothes instead of winter ones, and I thought we would go somewhere in hot weather.

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We arrived at Hitokappu Bay on November 24. It took us two days to get there, so it had happened around November 20.

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We arrived in Hitokappu Bay in the very early morning. When I looked out the porthole, I saw four carriers. There were two battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. Kaga was the last ship which received the last twelve torpedoes. So Kaga was the last ship to arrive at Hitokappu Bay. I think we left for Pearl Harbor on November 26. Considering it(?) was on 24th, it(?) happened four days later.

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We loaded torpedoes onto the ship at night. Tomioka Air Base was located near the beach, and there were no mountains blocking off the sight. Many houses were around the Air Base. So we were afraid that we might get shot, and we started loading them at midnight.

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There were two carriers moored at ____ (?) We received a telegram.

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Around Hitokappu Bay, nobody was allowed to use telephones and radios, and nobody could even imagine the task force was gathering there. All over the island. We arrived there on November 24. Then, all of the aviators went to Akagi for a meeting, and we were gathered in a room, where a big diorama of Pearl Harbor was set up. Next day we left for Hawaii. I think it was November 29. I was surprised that, though air carriers didn't usually do, all battleships and cruisers test-fired their guns for the maintenance purpose. When they departed, they started test-firing. It was winter, and the thick snow lay already. They started firing, as if they would scatter the snow. The sight made me realize we would finally go to war. As you know, merchant ships didn't usually sail on the North Pacific Ocean, because it always got

rough. For the Japanese Navy, it was the best route to head towards Hawaii secretly. So we dared to go a long way round, sailing up north along the Japanese coast line, heading to Hitokappu Bay, and then, we went to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. However, the ocean was so rough. For a few days, we couldn't even sit and eat the meal, because the ship was shaking so badly, and the plates and foods couldn't stay still on the table. We ended up eating without sitting at the table. It was a rough voyage. As we approached to Hawaii, it got warmer and warmer. Two days before December 8 in Japan Time, which was on December 7 in the U.S. Time, our captain held a farewell party, though I don't know about the other ships. On board Kaga, we had a big farewell party on December 6 (JST). Our Lt. Commander Hashiguchi said, "After this party, I will prohibit consuming any alcohol. So you can drink as much as you want tonight." Some people even poured sake over the captain's head. Everybody was drunk. That was the last day.

Finally, it was December 7 in the U.S. Time. That day the weather was fine, and the ocean was calm. We woke up at five in the morning. Then, we had breakfast. We ate fish with its head and tail. We could rarely eat it, especially on the carrier.

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Each ship had a shrine, such as the Akagi Shrine, and the Kaga Shrine, below the flight deck. We paid a visit to the shrine, and then the maintenance men tested the airplanes on the flight deck.

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We couldn't usually eat fish with its head and tail on the ship, but a pay master tried...

After we paid a visit to the shrine, we went up to the flight deck. What we did was... First, as it says that it was A2-312, "A1" meant Akagi, and "A2" meant Kaga. This was the first carrier division. As for "312," each number meant the first letter of a word. The fighters had the 100 level, the carrier bombers the 200 level, and the torpedo attack planes 300 level. My plane was 312. That picture was drawn by an American painter, who made a specialty of airplanes in Chicago, and _____(?) asked him to draw it and sent it to me. Anyway, my plane was 312.

First, a maintenance man got on a pilot's seat and checked the engine. Our biggest concern was a torpedo would fail to be released. First of all, we had to test if a torpedo would be released, setting up a safety net at the bottom of the plane, and we practiced to drop it.

Then, we loaded it again with the plane. The maintenance guy made sure if the engine was OK. After that, the Zero fighters first took off, because they were lined up in the very front row on the carrier. Since they could fly light, they first took off. Next were the carrier bombers. They loaded a 250 kg bomb with them, and they were also light and

had only two aviators. They took off next. The last one was the torpedo bomber unit, which was lined up at the very end. It had 12 planes, because we had only 12 torpedoes. Those 12 planes took off. Then, I was surprised. It looked like Lt. Kitajima's plane kicked the deck. He flew the first plane of our unit, and then I did the second. We rolled longer than the others, because there was more room on the runway after the fighters and the carrier bombers took off. The torpedo weighed 830 kg and it was pretty heavy. When we finally took off,.....

When we went to the flight deck, the aircrafts blocked off the runway, and they sank down. They sank down lower than the flight deck, because of the weight of the torpedo. I was surprised to see that, since it was the first time for us to load a real torpedo with the plane. This required experience. We needed to do a lot of training. It took only 15 minutes that my plane, which weighed 300-something kg, joined the formation. Then, all of the airplanes flew over Akagi, and headed towards Pearl Harbor. We gathered at the north away from Pearl Harbor. The first attack unit consisted of the 183 aircrafts, and they took off at 0605. The second attack unit took off at 0705, an hour later than the first attack unit. It consisted of the 250 airplanes. The first attack unit consisted of the 183 planes gathered from all carriers. The 183 planes.

They took off at the 360-km north away from Oahu Island.

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The second attack unit consisted of the 167 aircrafts. They took off at the 360-km north away from Oahu Island. In total, 350 airplanes and 720 aviators. We lost five torpedo bombers. All were from Kaga. Because Kaga was the first one. We lost only five carrier bomber in total. No, I mean 17 in total. We lost 12 torpedo bombers and 9 Zero fighters in total. The carriers didn't get any damage at all.

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It seemed like a machine gun hit the tail unit. This was not fired by the battleship West Virginia. Ford Island, no, I mean, there were so many small ships at anchor, which nobody expected to attack us, at the inner part of Pearl Harbor. They were not our targets, so they fired hard. One of those bullets hit it. I think the battleship West Virginia didn't have time to prepare for the counterattack. Richard Fiske told me so later. At eight in the morning, the battleship West Virginia was flying a battle flag at a pole. Any countries did the same thing. At eight in the morning. Taking all in all, Japan was supposed to give a declaration of war to the U.S. in Washington D.C. at eight in the morning. It was December 7 on the U.S. Time. Commander Isoroku Yamamoto gave us an order not to start an attack before eight. So we were checking a watch. When we flew over Barbers

Point, it already passed 7:50am. So we were almost ready to start the attack exactly at eight. After we passed Barbers Point, we could see Hickam Field on the right side, and there was an Air Base for many large planes. It was not our target, so we flew over it and headed to Pearl Harbor. We could see an airport of Barbers Point on the left. There were small planes. Anyway, we needed to be punctual. We were told if we attacked first without the declaration, it would be a big diplomatic dispute. I thought everybody followed the order, but some didn't. It was the carrier bomber unit. There was Wheeler Airport located at the north of Pearl Harbor. The Type 99 planes attacked it. It seemed the carrier bomber unit started the attack a bit earlier than eight o'clock. We, the torpedo bomber unit, never did that. We started exactly at eight.

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On this picture, aviators who returned from an attack were writing down what they did in chalk at the flight deck. The left is an aviator, and the right a maintenance man or else. This is not Kaga. I think it is Akagi or something.

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There is a question saying, "When you returned to Kaga, were there any planes which failed to land on the ship, or fell down to the edge of the flight deck because of damages?" Well, I don't know about the other ships, but one Zero fighter failed to land on Kaga, because its wheel got hit and it got a flat tire. Then, it fell down. It not only fell down, but also the pilot died. There is a temple of Nichiren on Oahu Island. The Nichiren temple holds a memorial service every year, because the other temples don't want to do that. I have ever attended it. When they counted the number of death, they missed one plane. I told them that one plane fell down by the failure of landing, not by the attack. That's why I remembered the number well. So the first attack unit lost five planes, which were all from Kaga, as I mentioned earlier. We lost five carrier bombers and two carrier fighters. Twelve. Kaga lost the most planes. In all, we lost 12 torpedo bombers, 17 carrier bombers, and 9 fighters. One out of nine fighters ran out of fuel, and it got hit and started a leak of the fuel. It made an emergency landing at an island, and the pilot was attacked and killed by inhabitants of the island. It happened to one fighter. The other eight planes fell down at the battle. Before we took off, we were told that the Japanese submarine, which went underwater near the island, would rescue us when it found any plane landing on the island. That's why the pilot landed on the island. Mr. Harada, the second generation of Japanese-American, helped the pilot, and he also ended up getting killed by the inhabitants. It was one out of the nine planes. The eight planes fell down at the battle. Kaga lost the most. It lost five torpedo bombers,

five carrier attack planes, and two fighters. Twelve in all. It suffered a biggest loss.

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No, I wasn't worried about the weather. It had been good since a few days before. There was no chance of rain. We had a calm east wind. If it was a west wind, we would have a problem. After we attacked Hickam Air Base, a east wind would have brought clouds of smoke towards us. If so, we couldn't see the target. But there was a west wind, and we could see the target clearly. Hickam was near Pearl Harbor.

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I thought what a beautiful island Oahu was. Yellow pineapples here and there. It was better that I could still think about that.

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We didn't have any operations to land on the center of Oahu Island. Our planes flew from the north. East, no, we flew along the west coast, and passed Barbers Point. When we turned right at the mouth to Pearl Harbor, we could see Hickam Air Base on the right side, and Barbers airport on the left side.

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I wasn't excited about the attack. We thought we would die at the battle. All we had to do was hit the targets. My target was the battleship West Virginia, whose captain was Admiral Kimmel, who was also Commander-in-chief of U.S. Pacific Fleet. It was the biggest battleship at that time. We hit it seven times. We hit West Virginia. Then, it sank. Though it sank, the water pored in the ship evenly, and it sank to the bottom on an even keel. The survivor of West Virginia, Richard Fiske told me that they had a lot of water, but their ship settled to the bottom on an even keel. Then, they swam to Ford Island. Nobody died. I think they were lucky.

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At the post-war, the West Virginia, well, it sounds weird to say "the post-war." Around May 1945, it was only three months before the end of the war. Then, we had a torpedo attack at night. We left Kagoshima, and went to Okinawa to attack the U.S. ships at anchored off there at midnight. My duty was not to drop torpedoes, but to drop illuminating flares and make as light as day to aim at the targets. My plane was loaded with two of illuminating flare, and just one of them could make the sight as light as day. Then, I saw the battleship which looked like the West Virginia. I was wondering why the West Virginia was just sailing off in front of me, because it was supposed to have

sunk to the bottom of Pearl Harbor. After the war, I had a chance to ask about it, when I visited Hawaii. Fortunately, the West Virginia settled to the bottom of Pearl Harbor on an even keel. The other ships sank like this. They leaned towards either way. Then, the West Virginia drained off completely. There were only 700 meters away from the east coast of the west side, where there was a dock. They pulled the ship into the dock, and got it to drain off first to pull it to the dock. It took two and a half years to repair it. However, at that time, any battleships didn't need to fire anymore. When we were ordered to attack the U.S. ships anchored off Okinawa, we saw the West Virginia. When I heard about the story of the ship, I was so surprised. The U.S. repaired and made it work in two and a half years, even though the ship had sunken to the bottom. I thought the U.S. had pretty good skills and technology. I don't understand why our higher rank officers didn't even think about destroying the deck. We thought we would have the third air attack wave, and what we would do. We could destroy the dock. The U.S. had a great amount of gasoline around Pearl Harbor. Crude petroleum and gasoline. Crude petroleum was for battleships, and gasoline for aircrafts. If we could have destroyed all of them, we could have burnt them out completely, with only three or four bombs. We returned without doing that. I thought our officers were so stupid. I got angry with them. Fleet Admiral Nagumo didn't even have any experiences of battles, nor he had anything. I thought we didn't have any smart officers.

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Why didn't we had the third air attack wave? We had forces enough to spare for the third attack. There were many aviators who didn't fly yet. They were ready to do so. However, we just returned without doing anything.

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I wanted to attack more. We assumed that the West Virginia was totally dead. But there was a dock near the harbor. It was only 700 meters away. After they got the ship to drain off, they could easily pull it into the dock. Once the ship drained off, it was easy to repair it. Seven hits. Even though we hit it seven times...

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I dropped torpedoes, not bombs. The torpedoes ran well, as the drills which we had at Kagoshima Bay. We needed at least 300meters to make it run well. We dropped a torpedo at 350 meters away from the target, and hit it. It hit a mast. We didn't have time to make sure if we hit the target or not. The planes flew faster than the torpedo ran. When we turned around, we could see it hit the target. We could see a column of water. It was usually white, but it was brown, because sand

at the bottom was brown. In deep water, we saw the white column of water. I was surprised how shallow Pearl Harbor was. I had never dropped it at the shallow water. I also have something to have wondered about the Arizona, which was at anchor at the front position of the very right side. It was the newest battleship at that time. The reason why the torpedo bombers didn't attack the Arizona was that there was a small ship working on it to repair or something. When we attacked them, it was harder to hit the Arizona with torpedoes, because the small ship was in our way. However, we couldn't aim at the other ships on the left side from there. It was unfortunate that the Arizona was at the front position.

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The U.S. stroke back at us right away. I assume they had a drill for a counterattack. They fired back right away. It was Sunday. December 7th. The ship usually reduced their forces by half. Half of the aviators who were off duty went out. There was Honolulu City on Oahu Island. It was so small that everybody went to Honolulu. They enjoyed drinking. We were favored by attacking on Sunday. I guess the officers chose the day on purpose.

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We didn't have any meeting points after the attack. There was the easternmost point of Oahu Island. Kahuku Point. We were told to meet there after the attack. But it took a while that all airplanes gathered there. Once three or four planes gathered, they returned to the ship. After launching a torpedo, the wire which was holding it hung down from a torpedo bomber. You could tell easily it was a torpedo bombers because of the hanging wire. We didn't feel that the enemy might plan to ambush us. There was no danger. During our flight, we just got a telegram, saying "Tora! Tora! Tora!" which meant that "You must accomplish the surprise attack." Other than that, we didn't receive any further orders.

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"Tora! Tora! Tora!" was a code, meaning "You must accomplish the surprise attack." Captain Fuchida was not only the commander of Akagi, but also responsible for the coordination of the entire aerial attack. Captain Fuchida sent us the telegram. It said, "We must accomplish the surprise attack." However, he made a complete failure. We had a signal gun named "Hakuryu." It was a kind of gun. If you fired it, a plane gave out smoke. "Hakuryu" means "a white dragon." "Tora! Tora! Tora!" meant a surprise attack, where the U.S. aircrafts didn't fly at all, nor they seemed to ambush us. Other than that, we had another code, "Hakuryu." I mean, if the U.S. didn't launch their fighters, it would be a surprise attack or non-surprise

attack. If they planned to ambush us, "Hakuryu" would be fired twice, three bullets each. That was the plan. Then, "Hakuryu" was fired once, three bullets. We watched the sky for a while and we didn't see the second fire. So we assumed that this would be a surprise attack, and we executed the operation for the surprise attack. However, no airplanes responded to it, and Captain Fuchida fired again. This was a mistake. The second fire made us think that it would be a violent attack. Then, the fighters took off first. After them, the carrier bombers took off. They first dropped bombs at the airport in Honolulu. There were a lot of airplanes, and they caught fire and the airport was filled with smoke. So we, torpedo bombers, had difficulty in aiming at our targets. However, fortunately we had the easterly wind. It cleared up the smoke, we could see the port on Ford Island. It was good, but if the wind blew in the different directions, we couldn't see anything. That was for a violent attack. Captain Fuchida made a big mistake.

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I didn't see any U.S. fighters on my way to the carrier.

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The day before the attack, all U.S. carriers were gone. We got the information from our spy there. Our biggest target was those carriers. Hiryu and Soryu were supposed to attack those carriers. They headed toward the west coast. We went to the east coast. Our target was the battleships, such as California, West Virginia, and Nevada. It was the wrong information.

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I was very fortunate to participate in the attack on Pearl Harbor, and to accomplish my mission. I was the last person to join the training at Kaga. Lt. Kitajima got on the first plane, and I got on the second. It means I think that they thought highly of my skills. We made a plan that a few fighters would attack the ship after Lt. Kitajima aimed at it. Right after Lt. Kitajima, though there was a picture that showed it, I hit the West Virginia. Seven torpedoes hit the West Virginia. Though I mentioned earlier, I was surprised to see it sailing off Okinawa three or four years after the attack, when I fired illuminating flares at midnight. That picture shows that when I visited Pearl Harbor, Richard Fiske from the West Virginia.....

08:16:13:14

This is Lt. Kitajima. This is me.

08:17:18:09

This is my plane. This picture was taken by a photographer, who was on a plane behind me.

08:17:51:16

This is me.

08:17:58:03

It seems like the plane flew at low altitude, so this picture was taken pretty close to Pearl Harbor.

08:18:32:05

No, I never thought we would fight against the U.S.

08:18:43:05

I had a feeling that we might lose the war against the U.S. I thought we would never win.

08:18:53:21

We never had a chance to talk to Americans or see them. As I told you earlier, I thought we would attack ports in Hong Kong or in Singapore.

08:20:02:08

I don't have that much thoughts about the surrender. I was just relieved by the fact that the war was finally over.

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After the attack, I went back to Iwakuni Air Base in Yamaguchi Prefecture, where the U.S. air force is stationed now to defend Japan. But only the aviators of Kaga went there. It was the end of December, and we got a week vacation. I went back home. Though I went back home, my father was already dead, so I had only brothers there.

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It is not only I that think so, but everybody agrees with me. We thought that the island nation, Japan could never beat the big nation, America. In my opinion, it was no wonder that we lost. A big nation means that it has a huge land, such as China. We shouldn't have gone to war against the U.S. in the first place. How reckless of Japan to fight against the U.S.! As I mentioned earlier, the U.S. had skills and forces to repair the almost dead ship which got seven torpedoes and could participate in a battle in Okinawa. They also manufactured aircrafts which could fight against the Zero fighters. I didn't think that much about their torpedo bombers, but their Hell Divers(?) were their forte, so I assumed they must be good. At Battle of Midway, we completely lost. That was the Japanese Navy's fault.